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EPA: Dig Up San Jacinto Waste Pits

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Superfund Site Solution



San Jacinto Waste Pits

The cleanup plan to address highly toxic dioxin contamination at the San Jacinto Waste Pits Superfund site in Harris County, Texas has been approved. The selected remedy will protect human health and the environment by removing highly contaminated material from the site and securing less contaminated areas. The plan provides certainty to people living near the site by permanently addressing risk posed by the contamination. It also provides certainty to other economic interests including the businesses that rely on the San Jacinto River for navigation and the Interstate-10 transportation corridor

"Today, we are announcing our decision to ensure the San Jacinto site is cleaned up for the benefit of the entire community," said EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. "As exemplified today, EPA is prioritizing Superfund clean-up by making decisions in a decisive, timely manner. The San Jacinto Waste Pits site was added to the National Priority List nearly a decade ago, and I am pleased to announce a decision has been made to permanently address the highly toxic materials to ensure health and safety in the surrounding communities."

EPA's cleanup plan includes installing engineering controls such as cofferdams before excavating almost 212,000 cubic yards of dioxin contaminated material for disposal. A small amount of material will stay on the site where controls will prevent access, eliminate offsite migration and monitor the natural recovery into the future. The estimated cost for the remedy is \$115 million and is cost-effective; representing a reasonable value for the cost incurred

Posted: Thursday, October 12, 2017 12:00 am

By Christopher James

1 comment

After years of fighting for removal of the San Jacinto River Waste Pits, environmental activists and residents can breathe a little easier now knowing they are one step closer to getting the pits removed, as the Environmental Protection Agency approved just that Wednesday.

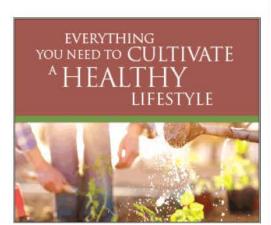
"Today, we are announcing our decision to ensure the San Jacinto site is cleaned up for the benefit of the entire community," said EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. "As exemplified today, EPA is prioritizing Superfund cleanup by making decisions in a decisive, timely manner. The San Jacinto Waste Pits site was added to the National Priority List nearly a decade ago, and I am pleased to announce a decision has been made to permanently address the highly toxic materials to ensure health and safety in the surrounding communities."

The selected remedy is full removal, and will "protect human health and the environment by removing highly contaminated material from the site and securing less contaminated areas "

The EPA's cleanup plan includes installing engineering controls such as cofferdams before excavating almost 212,000 cubic yards of dioxin-contaminated material for disposal. A small amount of material will stay on the site. where controls will prevent access, eliminate off-site migration and monitor the natural recovery into the future. The estimated cost for the remedy is \$115 million.

"It's so surreal," said Jacquelyn Young of the Texas Health and Environmental Alliance. "I have countless community members, my father included, saying we're not going to live to see the end of this. And I couldn't help but get choked up making that phone call to my dad and making the first few calls to our residents letting them know this site that has plagued your neighborhood for so long is going to be taken care of. It's just incredible."

The EPA's final cleanup plan, called a Record of Decision, addresses comments on the proposed plan concerning the risk of water spreading dioxin





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contamination downstream by installing controls such as

cofferdams to allow for dry excavation of the waste material.

The EPA's selected remedy will permanently address the highly toxic dioxin waste materials, meets the federal regulatory requirements of the National Contingency Plan for cleanup of hazardous sites, and is protective of public health and the environment, the agency said. EPA will release an Administrative Record, which consists of all documents used to support its selected remedy.

"The hard work by County Attorney Vince Ryan and his staff has been remarkable," said Jack Morman, Harris County Commissioner Precinct 2. "Jackie Young, Galveston Bay Foundation and other activists have been relentless in advocating for this solution and I'm thrilled the EPA made the right decision."

Over the years, elected officials have supported removal of the waste pits as leaks from the protective temporary cap were reported time and time again. More recently, EPA dive teams reported collecting samples after the flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey that showed that the protective cap over the waste pit site "had been damaged and the underlying waste material was exposed." The EPA found that one of its samples showed waste was exposed at a level 2,300 times recommended for cleanup.

"I want to thank EPA Administrator Pruitt for this decision," said County Attorney Ryan. "We appreciate that he visited the San Jacinto site personally and that he had EPA personnel checking it out to discover the dioxin exposure after the hurricane."

The Superfund site, which is a set of impoundments, was built in the mid-1960s for disposing solid and liquid pulp and paper mill wastes that are contaminated with cancer-causing dioxins and furans. In 2011, the impoundments were covered with an armored cap as a temporary way to contain the contaminants.

The EPA's decision, fully explained in the Record of Decision, is based on extensive studies of the contamination, human health risks, and environmental risks of this site.

In fact, in 2015, the Texas Department of State Health Services found a large number of cancer clusters in parts of eastern Harris County, including Highlands, which border the Superfund site.

The final cleanup plan also considers the ever-changing San Jacinto River—which encroaches on the site—and protecting important downstream resources including the Galveston Bay estuary.

"I thank the EPA for making the right decision to remove the toxic waste pits out of the San Jacinto River," said Rep. Gene Green. "Our communities in eastern Harris County have been fighting for over a decade to have the dioxin and other cancer-causing toxic waste fully removed and disposed of safely. We will be monitoring the remediation process closely and call on the EPA to move as quickly as feasibly possible before additional dioxin is exposed into the environment."

Last year the EPA proposed a plan to remove 202,000 cubic yards of contaminated material from the northern and southern impoundments.

This original proposal was to remove a majority of the existing cap along with 152,000 cubic yards of contaminated materials. The remedy for the northern site was estimated to take 19 months at a price of \$87 million.

As for the southern site, the EPA proposed removing 50,000 cubic yards of toxic materials, which would have cost \$9.9 million and take about seven months.

But with the EPA recently approving a more effective solution to the waste pits, changes in the construction method will effectively eliminate any potential for spreading contamination to downstream areas. The \$97 million proposed plan outlined wet excavation of material.

"Galveston Bay Foundation applauds the EPA's decision to require removal of the dioxin-laden wastes from the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund Site at I-10 in Channelview," said Scott Jones with Galveston Bay Foundation. "It ends a lengthy period of debate on the future of the waste at the site and will result in final remediation and cleanup for the site."

"This is a welcome step forward," said Kara Cook-Schultz, TexPIRG Toxics Director. "It is great that the EPA is removing toxic chemicals to keep them from ever running free into the San Jacinto River. This is a strong signal that the EPA is willing to fix a deadly problem. But it's not the only site at risk. The next step is for EPA to remove toxic soil at other flood-prone sites in Texas and around the country."

McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corp. statement

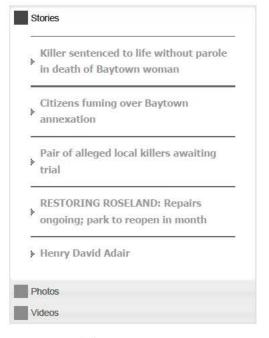
Although many elected officials, residents and activists are praising the EPA's decision to remove toxic contaminants from the waste pits, McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corp., a potentially responsible party, is concerned with the plan.

"We cannot support a plan for the site that provides less protection to all affected communities than the existing cap already has provided," MIMC said Wednesday. "We are deeply concerned that the decision announced today could



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result in a release to the San Jacinto River and downstream areas. We disagree with EPA's claim that the local or downstream areas can be protected during removal. We will review U.S. EPA's Record of Decision in its entirety."



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